

JUL 21 1938

DRAMA

A MONTHLY RECORD OF THE THEATRE
IN TOWN AND COUNTRY
AT HOME & ABROAD



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AMATEUR & A HOME-MADE
CYCLORAMA & ILLUSTRATIONS

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DRAMA

VOL 16

JULY-SEPTEMBER, MCMXXXVIII

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THE JOURNAL OF THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

PLAYS OF THE MONTH

By James Agate

I AM very cross with Mr. Darlington who in the corresponding article for last month wrote:—"On the very last day of the period under review came an exciting importation—the Lunts at the Lyric in 'Amphitryon 38.'" And he then proceeded to review the only good piece in the London theatre which he or I or any of us have seen in what feels like years. It would have been friendly of Mr. Darlington to leave me the one play about which I have really any desire to write. But Mr. Darlington did the unfriendly thing—I admit because he couldn't help it. Hence these sulks, nevertheless!

My survey of the month must begin, then, with a revue, Mr. Cochran's "Happy Returns" at the Adelphi. Everybody knows that the only thing which makes a manager happy *is* returns, and at first these were not too good. But then how could they be? The revue had been put together in such a curious way. There was Miss Beatrice Lillie trying hard to be vulgar and succeeding. There were Messrs. Flanagan and Allen trying hard to be a success without being vulgar, and failing. When the attendance got so bad that the performance was interrupted by small boys who had come in from the Strand to play in the stalls, Mr. Cochran decided to give Messrs. Flanagan and Allen their heads. Whereby the show has become a success, though I still think that Miss Lillie needs a partner rather than alternative comedians to hold the stage till she is ready for the next turn. Were I a revue-producer, I should choose a partner who would carry just as many guns as Miss Lillie, and perhaps a few more. I mean, and can only mean, Mr. Max Miller.

I now come to two political plays—Mr. Norman Macowan's "Glorious Morning" at the Duchess, and Miss Vere Sullivan's "Trumpeter, Play!" at the Garrick. This matter of political plays hits the British public in its weakest spot, because the public of this country is remarkable for this, that while knowing everything about morality it knows nothing about art. The British public conceives two things with difficulty—first, that an immoral play can be a good play, and second, that a moral play can be a bad play. It is a desirable thing, thinks the British public, that sermons against war should be preached from the stage as from the pulpit. Therefore any plays with this desirable motive must be desirable plays. Therefore any play against war must be a good play. Wherefore the advertisement columns of our newspapers are filled with tributes to the one of these plays from the Hon. Sir Stafford Cripps, K.C., J.P., M.P., Sir Malcolm Campbell, M.B.E., (author of "Drifting to War"), Sir George Arthur, M.V.O., and Humbert Wolfe, C.B., C.B.E. And so on and so forth. Really I am not more impressed by this than I should be if tributes were forthcoming from the station-master at Euston and the temperature-regulator at Paddington Baths!

"Glorious Morning" merely told us that young ladies ought not to be shot for believing in God. "Trumpeter, Play!" reminded us that if and when Germany and England are at war it is very awkward for the English wives of German husbands, and for the German wives of English husbands. Well, we knew all about that before the curtain rose. But then one knows everything about all

PLAYS OF THE MONTH

sermons before they are preached. And there is this difference between a sermon and a play: the preacher who said anything new would be turned out of his church, whereas the playwright who doesn't ought not to be allowed on the stage. Therefore I regard these two plays as excellent sermons and poor dramas, and as I do not go to Church to be entertained by theatrical displays, so I do not go to the theatre to be preached at. All of which does not alter the fact that Mr. Macowan and Miss Sullivan have written admirable little dramas, always provided that you go to the drama to admire that sort of thing.

At the St. Martin's there is an amusing little Irish comedy called "Spring Meeting" which is destroyed entirely by Mr. Arthur Sinclair who is far too good for his small part in it, and by Mr. Roger Livesey who is nothing like the Irish squire he is supposed to be. The piece is saved from destruction, however, by its wit and by a grand piece of acting by Miss Margaret Rutherford who is at least as good as Mrs. Partick Campbell and Miss Lilian Braithwaite rolled into one.

Talking about these two ladies brings me to Mr. Ivor Novello's "Comedienne" at the Haymarket. I confess that the spectacle of one distinguished actress stabbing another in the back which happens to be on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean is not an edifying spectacle.

"Babes in the Wood," which was done at the Embassy, was one more example of Mr. James Bridie's inability to let a week pass without writing a new play. The revival of Gogol's farce, "Marriage," at the Westminster, is being greatly enjoyed by everybody who did not see the Moscow players give a masterly performance of it some ten years ago at the Garrick. "Lot's Wife" at the Whitehall is a witty piece of nonsense. "White Secrets" at the Fortune is a very exciting little drama about one of the Poles, and "The Sun Never Sets" at Drury Lane is a mildly exciting melodrama about the Equator. Of these last two plays I am inclined to think that the second is the greater frost!

On the very day I write this there is to be produced at the St. James's Mr. Clifford Odet's "Golden Boy," which is obviously going to be the only tolerable play since "Amphitryon 38." With that unselfishness which is my most striking characteristic I am leaving this play to be dealt with by the writer of next month's notes. *O si sic Darlington!*

FRENCH PUPPETEERS IN CONGRESS

The first Annual Congress of the French Puppeteers, held in May, opened with a civic reception at the Town Hall of Paris and closed with a banquet and a performance of "Punch and Judy" by a member of the sister organisation, the British Puppet Guild. It revealed a variety of surviving puppet tradition. The Congress started with a performance of the famous Guignol of Lyons, which is actually the town of his origin. The family Neithausen, direct descendants of Guignol's creator, Laurent Moureguet, silk-spinner in the early years of the 19th century, presented a programme, preceded by an introductory talk by their patron, Mr. Justin Godart, a former Minister of Education, and present President of the Federation of French Puppeteers. The next day came the turn of the string puppets and the dynasty of Pajot, (the family tradition reaches back into the 18th century) rendered a patriotic drama of the romantic school, "Joan of Flanders." With tender skill there was played a story of chivalry such as must have stirred our forefathers in the '40s at Drury Lane or the Surrey Theatre. There were five acts, each a complete change of scene, and sometimes there were twenty puppets on the stage. Manipulation and articulation was the work of the father and his son and daughter, who afterwards presented a 'variety' programme, familiar to us through visits of the Pajot family to English music halls. M. Pajot senr, aged 75 yrs, is shortly to become a member of the Legion of Honour. Their performance was prefaced by an informative address on the travelling puppet theatres of France by M. Gaston Baty, one of the producers of the Comedie Francaise, who also invited the members of the Congress to a performance at his 'human' theatre, the Theatre Montparnasse, which occupies a place in the Paris theatre roughly similar to that of the Gate Theatre in England.

The amateur theatre was represented by "Les Amis de Lafleur," from Amiens.

Two companies from the gardens of Paris also gave shows which included "The Temptation of St. Anthony," one of the oldest French marionette plays, but which was received in rather an irreverent way. Another company exhibited for a brief instant a Polichinelle, Punch's cousin, and of great age, and who spoke with a 'swizzle' (the instrument which gives Punch his peculiar way of talking, in Paris called a 'pratique').

The Congress, which also included sessions to discuss matters of technical interest, was held in the charming little theatre of the Paris newspaper, "Le Journal." It attracted a great deal of attention; all the shows were recorded by Radio Luxembourg and were later relayed, while Mr. Punch made a first appearance before the French television camera.

Meanwhile in England the marionettes have not been idle. At Whitsun the Marionette Theatre of Malvern held a Festival in that delightful town, and will later during the Shaw Festival in August give special performances. About the same time the Roel Puppets at Lower Guiting in the Cotswold district hold their second annual Summer School, and at Mr. Ashley Duke's Mercury Theatre at Notting Hill Gate the Binyon Sisters have been giving a season of puppet playlets, by Montagu Slater with music by Benjamin Britten and Lennox Berkeley.

SHAKESPEARE PROBLEMS

BREAKING-UP AND SPEEDING-UP

By Frederick S. Boas

"The Sonnets of Shakespeare and Southampton." Edited with an Introduction by Walter Thomson. Basil Blackwell, Oxford, and Henry Young & Sons, Liverpool. 12s. 6c. net.

"Speeding up Shakespeare: Studies of the Bygone Theatre and Drama." By W. J. Lawrence. The Argonaut Press. 10s. 6d. net.

SHAKESPEARE'S Sonnets are always with us, and the latest recruit to the army of interpreters is Mr. Walter Thomson. Critics have approached the Sonnets from every sort of angle, and Mr. Thomson's primary aim is to rescue Shakespeare's reputation from the charge of moral perversion. Sonnet 20 begins:

A woman's face with nature's own hand painted
Hast thou, the master-mistress of my passion.

Because the German lexicographer, Dr. Schmidt in 1874 interpreted here "master-mistress" as "a male mistress" and "passion" as "amorous desire," Mr. Thomson affirms that the world in general believes Shakespeare to have been a homosexualist. In my opinion Mr. Thomson much exaggerates Schmidt's influence, but there is a great deal to be said for his contention that "passion" in the above line should be given the meaning, found elsewhere, of an emotional poem. But this does not make such a fundamental difference as Mr. Thomson claims. The phrase "master-mistress" remains. It is not necessary to give the words a literal interpretation, but it is idle to deny that Shakespeare in the Sonnets, and Marlowe in "Edward II" and elsewhere, infuses into the relations between older and younger men an amorous intensity which is strange to our outlook to-day.

Mr. Thomson assumes that Sonnet 20 is addressed to the Earl of Southampton and that it is closely related to "The Lover's Complaint" which appeared with the Sonnets in Thorpe's 1609 quarto. Even those who feel uncertain about Southampton being here Shakespeare's friend will, as a rule, prefer this view to the Will Hughes theory (based on another line in Sonnet 20, "A man in hew, all *Hews* in his controlling") adopted by Samuel Butler and Oscar Wilde, rejected here by Mr. Thomson, but recently again sponsored by Lord Alfred Douglas. Mr. Thomson is bent in saving not only Shakespeare's moral but his

poetic reputation. Here he summons to his aid some lines in Sonnet 125:

No, let me be obsequious in thy heart
And take thou my oblation, poor but free,
Which is not mix'd with seconds, knows no art
But mutual render, only me for thee.

"My oblation," Mr. Thomson interprets as the sonnets written by Shakespeare to his friend and "mutual render" he takes to imply that there was an exchange of poems between them. There were thus "two pens" at work, of very different quality, and Mr. Thomson transfers bodily to Southampton twenty-six of the sonnets numbered in Thorpe's quarto from 32 to 122, as well as the bulk of the "Dark Woman" series, 127 to 154, though he finds it "impossible to lay at the door of either Southampton or Shakespeare responsibility for the sort of the rubbish to be found" in this series. Calling as evidence two lines in "The Phoenix and the Turtle":

Single Nature's double name

Neither two nor more she was called

which he takes to refer to Shakespeare and Southampton, Mr. Thomson explains the riddle of 'W.H.' the 'onlie begetter' of the Sonnets as William (Shakespeare) and Henry (Wrothesley, Earl of Southampton.) Thorpe thus cryptically in his dedication alluded to the "two pens"!

So Mr. Thomson enrols himself amongst the growing band of distintegrators, and those who, like myself, take a more traditional stand can at any rate appreciate the attractive printing of the Sonnets and other poems in his volume.

Dr. W. J. Lawrence in the essay which gives the title to his volume of collected studies is concerned not with Shakespeare's morals or poetry but with his dramatic technique. He dislikes the "undignified speeding-up" of his plays on the stage to-day, and he maintains that this has no foundation in the dramatist's own practice. From a careful examination of his use of the words "act" and "scenes," Dr. Lawrence comes to the conclusion that "Shakespeare's plays were written in the prescribed five acts, and acted in his own day with four intervals,"

SHAKESPEARE PROBLEMS

though these may have been hardly more than pauses. As a pendant to this conclusion we have "Some reflections on Shakespeare's dramaturgy," where Dr. Lawrence draws attention to the fact that in his middle and final periods Shakespeare often withdrew his leading character from the stage during a large part of Acts IV and V. In "The Winter's Tale" he carries this to its extreme limit, when Hermione disappears for some 1690 lines. He thus deliberately aimed at a slackening of tension, and in this respect was "severely classic."

Apart from Shakespeare Dr. Lawrence deals

with many-sided dramatic and theatrical questions, from the dedications of plays to stage dummies and from the origin of bulls to the gravedigger's waistcoats. Most important of all for the stage-historian is his presentation of new facts from Sir Henry Herbert's office book, gleaned from annotations by Malone on the fly-leaves of some of his quartos in the Bodleian. These studies, though not new, have been revised and enlarged, and decorated with illustrations. They are a mine of out-of-the-way and entertaining lore presented by the author, *more suo*, in racy, and at times challenging, style.

THE SEA AND THE SKY

A HOME-MADE CYCLORAMA

MANY a time and oft the amateur wishes to produce a play in a setting which is both modern and gives a sense of unity to the production. Usually he is baffled by two things. Firstly, the stage at his disposal has not the necessary fittings, and secondly there is the matter of difficulty and expense which make him hesitate before constructing his own appliances. And so Africa on the one hand and Asia on the other are still as unsatisfactory, though for different reasons, as they were to Sir Philip Sidney.

Readers may be interested to know how these difficulties were overcome in a recent production of "The Admirable Crichton," at Bracondale School, Norwich.

It was wished to use a setting which should not only be modern, but should give a sense of unity between the scenes. The stage, which was erected in the School gymnasium and which possessed no more fittings, save for its proscenium and curtains, than the "scaffold hie" on which Chaucer's Joly Absolom performed, measured only 16' x 13'.

The two difficulties were the lack of space available and the cost of the production.

It was decided to maintain unity by the use of three pairs of black curtains on either side of the stage for wings, with adjustable black borders, which could be heightened or lowered at will, and by the erection of a cyclorama, which would be visible in all four acts,

together with three flats with a window in the centre flat for the London Home; a low ground row of rocks for the island, and a drop with the rocks and sky visible beyond for the Happy Island Home.

The advantage of the curtains and the cyclorama was that they gave the stage the appearance of being considerably larger than it really was. Also the difficulty of crowd exits and entrances was obviated by the impossibility of stating exactly through which opening in the curtains characters passed. Indeed, at times characters would enter through gaps between separate wings, and yet because of the insignificance of the black curtains, would appear to come through the self-same door.

Few stages on which amateurs perform contain a cyclorama, and the construction of such is often regarded as a superhuman effort. Readers may find the details which follow useful; they can rest assured that they were cheap and effective.

The finished cyclorama consisted of nothing more than a huge sheet of cardboard 18 ft. wide and 12 ft. high, suspended by ropes behind the stage (which had been erected away from the wall to leave a trough for lights, 1 ft. wide and 1 ft. 9 in. deep, which was extremely useful but not absolutely necessary). The cardboard was attached to battens at the top and bottom, and also to a third batten 4 ft. from the top. The two upper

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the Walton Troupe of Marionettes which
have toured France for over 150 years.



SCENE FROM A REHEARSAL OF "PLANT IN THE SUN" AT THE UNITY THEATRE CLUB. The producer, Herbert Marshall, shows how it should be done.
See page 154.

THE SEA AND THE SKY

battens were suspended by ropes from screw eyes in the roof, the suspension for the top batten being about 2 ft. nearer the audience than that for the middle batten, which was close against the back wall. By adjusting the respective heights of these battens the cyclorama was successfully made to curve towards the audience at the top, to vanish behind the rear border. The portion of the cardboard below the middle batten was pulled taut by the weight of the bottom batten. The cyclorama lighting for the play was required in three colours—amber, fading to red and finally to deep blue. This was achieved by a row of biscuit tins fitted with 100 watt. bulbs and gelatine medium at the top, behind the rear border, and another row at the bottom in the trough. The top row was made up as follows:—300 blue, 400 amb.; and the bottom:—400 amb., 500 red. With the use of two dimmers (800 watt. and 300 watt.) a very effective sunset effect was made possible.

It remains to describe the actual construction of the cyclorama:—a rectangle 18 ft. by 12 ft. was first chalked out on the floor of the gymnasium, and this was then completely covered by strips of cardboard 21 in. wide overlapping about 1 in. on each side, so that a succession of 'seams' were formed parallel to the shorter side of the rectangle. The cardboard was held flat to the floor by means of three drawing pins through each 'seam'. The strips were glued together firmly by the simple method of removing the pins from a seam, running a glue brush between the overlapping edges, pressing them together firmly and replacing the pins. Carpenters' glue diluted with an equal quantity of water was used, and thus was so quick-drying that by the time the last seam had been glued it was possible to start removing the pins. When all the pins had been removed the sheet was carefully unstuck from the floor—being *pulled up in the direction of the seams*. It was then replaced flat upon the floor, and papered with heavy ceiling paper, so that the seams in the paper were at right angles to the joins in the cardboard, and hence parallel to the 18 ft. side. The battens,—18-ft. beams of 2-in. by 1½-in. red deal—were then pushed under the sheet and the latter tacked down to them. The rows of tintacks were covered by an additional strip of paper—since no amount of whitewash will disguise the heads of tintacks under strong lights, and since in

any case it was not wished to whitewash the cyclorama. While still wet the cyclorama was picked up (one person at the ends of each batten) and carried on to the stage. It was then hoisted into approximately the required position and left to dry, the final adjustments being made later.

In conclusion a brief list of the most likely defects may be helpful:—First—and most important—the centre batten may sag. This must be avoided at all costs by sufficient support. Secondly the sides of the cardboard may cockle slightly owing to the pulling action of the drying paper. This cannot very well be avoided, but can be made unimportant by making the cyclorama considerably wider than will be visible. Thirdly the seams of the cardboard may show through if one buys cheap paper, so do not economise in this direction. Do not economise either with regard to tintacks—get plenty of broad-headed ones. Finally the cardboard may tend to tear when carried while still wet. This can be avoided by carrying the battens only; if the cardboard is not touched at all there should be no danger of tearing.

The last advantage of this simple cyclorama is that when the play is done it can be effectively rolled around the lowest batten and so safely stored away for later use, without occupying too much space.

Not only is it simple and cheap in construction, but the cyclorama dismisses many scenic problems for the ambitious amateur and opens to him many chances to experiment with his lighting.

W. McLEAN BRODIE BRODIE.
A. F. PENNYMORE.

ESSEX COUNTY COMMITTEE.

On June 18th, Miss Zimmerman kindly gave a Garden Party at Woodberrie Hill, Loughton, to Drama Workers from various parts of the county. The Marquis d'Oisy lectured on "Making Properties," and Mrs. Gregory Nicholson on "Noises Off," with illustrations.

Dekker's "Shoemakers' Holiday" is being rehearsed for performance in the autumn.

To be noted.

The Library will be closed during the first three weeks in August, and the Costume Department will be closed during the whole of the month.

The last date for sending in plays for the Village Drama Playwriting Competition is July 19. Particulars may be obtained from the Village Drama Section.

PAUL ROBESON BECOMES AN AMATEUR

By Haemi Scheien

OCCASIONALLY, though rarely, it happens that an actor of star calibre renounces for a time his star status and the prestige and financial reward that go with it in order to devote himself to the furtherance of his art in a less spectacular manner. Some years ago, it will be recalled, Mr. Charles Laughton refused a lucrative Hollywood contract and spent a season at the Old Vic at the salary, trifling for him, of £20 a week. And now Paul Robeson has gone one better. He has turned down several extremely tempting offers and is appearing, during the month of June, with a cast of amateurs at the Unity Theatre in St. Pancras, for which he is receiving no salary whatever.

The play is "Plant in the Sun," written by a young American playwright, Ben Bengal. There is not a star part in the play. Robeson is simply one of the cast—no more and no less. And he is very happy about it.

In spite of several difficulties, such for example as the fact that rehearsals can take place only in the evenings and on week-ends since the members of the cast are at other times occupied at their several workaday tasks—carpentry, book-keeping, stenography and so on—Robeson has thrown himself heart and soul into rehearsal, and it is certain that a salary of a thousand pounds a week could not have drawn from him greater effort or deeper conscientiousness.

The explanation for this is not far to seek. Six months ago Robeson renounced the West End stage until such time as it might offer him a play to his liking. This play has not yet arrived. And so Robeson is appearing at Unity in a play in which most West End managers would not be particularly interested. The amateur actor may ask what sort of play Robeson is looking for. And how is it that he, an actor and singer of the first rank is acting with amateurs in a small and as yet not well-known theatre?

These questions can perhaps best be answered in Robeson's own words. "Folk may well wonder," he said in an interview, "how I came to be interested in a theatre like

this. Well, I have to go into my history a bit to answer that."

"You see, my father was a slave—he escaped at the age of fifteen and became a farm labourer, a serf . . . my own father, a slave. And I myself, to get a schooling had to work in hotels during the summer holidays. At twelve years old," here he closed his eyes reminiscently, "I was assistant kitchen boy, peeling potatoes and scrubbing floors . . ."

"Later, I was often unable to pay my rent. Many times I walked the streets to avoid the embarrassment of admitting my condition . . . This play is about people I know facing problems I know."

Robeson, it does not need to be said, is a negro. He feels himself part of his people. Success, what to many would have been great and glorious success, has come to him. But success to Robeson brought a feeling of isolation.

"I felt myself drying up," he said in his great, deep voice. "And I thought of retiring. I said 'no more concerts.' I felt in an ambiguous position. I found myself acting in plays and films that cut against the very people and ideas that I wanted to help."

There's the gist of it. As Robeson put it, "For me it was a question of finding somewhere to work that would tie me up with the things I believed in, or stopping altogether. It was as strong as that." And then, with a smile charming in its modesty, "You see, I would rather starve than take a job that went against the feelings and wishes of the people of which I am a part." Catching perhaps a gleam of admiration in his interviewer's eye Robeson shook his head. "I'm just a man who hasn't forgotten where he came from. If I did I should be ashamed."

In spite of the fact that the play "Plant in the Sun" ran for some months on Broadway, it was discovered by Unity only after weeks of search. It concerns itself with the problems of five young men employed in a confectionery factory. Mr. Thomas H. Dickenson writing in the American "One-Act play Magazine" gave it as his considered opinion that the play

PAUL ROBESON BECOMES AN AMATEUR

was one of the most closely observed bits of drama that he had noticed for a long time; while the play was announced as the winner of the recent contest sponsored by the New Theatre League of America for a one-act play dealing with the problems of youth in that country at the present time.

Because it deals with the sort of problems Robeson was compelled to face in his own youth, he wished to act in it. The sympathy between actor and character is made even closer by the act that Robeson spent some time in his younger days in a factory—and a confectionery factory at that!

AUTHORS' FEES AGAIN

IN pursuance of a resolution passed at the Cardiff Conference a special Committee was appointed to consider if any further steps could be taken in regard to authors' fees.

In the meanwhile, it will be remembered that Mr. Cyril Hogg, of Messrs. Samuel French, Limited, the largest British firm of publishers closely concerned with amateur productions, explained and defined the attitude of his firm in an article which appeared in "The Amateur Theatre."

It became apparent to the Drama League Committee that for the present no useful purpose could be served by pressing for any drastic alteration in the normal basis of the "fixed fee." However, at the beginning of June the following correspondence passed between the Director of the League and Mr. Cyril Hogg which, with his permission we print below.

DEAR MR. HOGG,

We recently held a meeting of our Committee at which I was instructed to ask whether in respect of the special concessions you are making in the fees for certain plays, you would consider printing a note giving this information in the printed play itself? My Committee felt that this would be of great value to readers of the plays, and would perhaps incidentally serve to increase the number of performances.

Trusting that this suggestion may meet with your approval,

Yours sincerely,
GEOFFREY WHITWORTH.

DEAR MR. WHITWORTH,

In reply to your letter: with very few exceptions, and these only in the case of plays upon which we have a definite contract not to accept less than a fee of five guineas, we are prepared to allow any of the plays we control to be done at three performances paying two fees, provided the maximum capacity of the hall is 200.

If I were to do as you ask it means pretty well printing

a notice of this description in every single copy we have, which you will agree, is rather drastic.

I think you will find that in the course of time it will become generally known about the reduction. Anyhow, the greatest advantage is being taken of the concession, and as time goes on more and more people write to us for permission on the lines indicated.

Yours sincerely,
CYRIL HOGG.

STAGE GRAMOPHONE RECORDS.

We have received a very interesting group of Records recently issued by the Columbia Graphophone Company containing five double-sided records of excerpts from "King Richard II," spoken by Maurice Evans and Company assisted by Abraham Sofaer. These records are extraordinarily life-like, and the scenes, which include the Deposition Scene and the Prison Scene have been well chosen. They afford a fine object-lesson both in individual speech, and team work. The same Company also issue on behalf of the "International Education Society" records of a Shakespearean Recital by Sir Johnstone Forbes-Robertson. Here that wonderful voice with its flexible intonation is conserved for all time in passages from "Richard II," "Macbeth," "Hamlet" and "Henry VIII." In our view, however, there was a *timbre* in this great actor's vocal tone which did not entirely suit the mechanics of reproduction. We remember noticing the same defect on an occasion when a speech of his was broadcast by the B.B.C. That richness of quality seemed to set too hard a task for the microphone, and was transformed into something like heaviness.

The gem of the present group of records is certainly the H.M.V. record of the Sermon from "Murder in the Cathedral" as spoken by Robert Speaight, and very near to it comes Ion Swinley's rendering of "Gray's Elegy." Both are perfect examples of elocution, perfectly recorded.

The London Academy of Music (Queen's Gate Hall, Harrington Road, South Kensington, London S.W.7) notifies us that the Academy is now offering the Sir Seymour Hicks Scholarship giving free dramatic tuition for two years to a young man aged 16—21.

BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE NOTES



THE JOURNAL OF
THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE
INCORPORATING
THE VILLAGE DRAMA SOCIETY

President:
LORD HOWARD DE WALDEN

Chairman of the Council:
VISCOUNT ESHER

Director: GEOFFREY WHITWORTH.

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Telephone: EUSTON 2666.

Neither the Editor nor the Drama League as a whole accepts any responsibility for the opinions expressed in signed articles printed in this Journal.

THE Eleventh International Congress of the Theatre has opened as this number of "Drama" goes to press. Stratford-on-Avon is fuller than usual at this time of the year by some fifty Conference delegates who have come together from France, Germany, Belgium, Catalonia, Denmark, U.S.A., Holland, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Roumania, Portugal, Poland, Norway, Yugoslavia, and Australia. After three days of Conference under the shadow of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, the delegates repair to London, where social events take place, including a luncheon at the Savoy Hotel at which H.R.H. the Duke of Kent presides. The Drama League is proud to have organised this Congress on behalf of the British Section of the "Société Universelle du Theatre" which was founded by Firmin Gémier in 1926. If the theatre is to become a rallying point of international goodwill it can only be by the mutual understanding of its practitioners, gathered from many lands and conferring in an atmosphere of friendship. May the good work of the "Société" flourish and endure.

In the course of a debate on the Entertainment Tax in the House of Commons the other day, Sir John Simon admitted that the problem was a complicated one, and that in the coming twelve months he would give it further investigation. This is a sign that the efforts of the Stage and Allied Arts League have not been misplaced, and we do not share the pessimism of some as to the ultimate triumph of common sense in this matter which affects the whole of the living stage. It is, in our opinion, idle to talk of state subsidy for the theatre while this injustice remains. It is said that the managers alone would reap the benefit if the tax were remitted. Even if it were true, a flourishing entertainment industry is surely better than one which, as at present, can, with a few happy exceptions, scarcely keep its head above water.

The important experiment to be made in the Northern Area for the running of a Three-Act Play Competition throughout the Area, culminating in a Festival at Buxton, will arouse great interest throughout the League. This Competition had been planned before the offer made by the "American Theatre" in regard to a Three-Act Play festival was made public, and in any case the suggestion came too late for the coming year. The Northern Competition will take place after Christmas, and we hope it will win the enthusiastic support of Drama League Societies in that area.

The "News-Chronicle" Three-Act Play Competition is now also well on the way, and we cannot wish it better than a repetition of last year's success. The policy of the "set play" has met with some criticism, with which in a sense we sympathise. It would be a thousand pities if all competitions were conducted on this basis. But the "set play" has its own advantages, from the standpoint both of competitors and judges, and last year's experience shows that there are many societies who have no cause to regret their entry.

Members of the League will wish to congratulate Sir Kenneth Barnes on his well deserved honour of Knighthood. For many years a member of the League's Council, Sir Kenneth has always been a good friend to us, while under his ægis the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art has attained an unassailable position.

RECENT BOOKS

Reviewed by F. Sladen-Smith

"Trial of a Judge." By Stephen Spender. Faber and Faber. 5s.

"Come of Age." By Clemence Dane and Richard Addinsell. Heinemann. 6s.

"The Masque of Kings." By Maxwell Anderson. John Lane. 5s.

"Blind Man's Buff." By Ernst Toller and Denis Johnston. Cape. 3s. 6d.

"The Emperor of Make-Believe." By Madge Pemberton and Malcolm Morley. French. 2s.

"The Making of England." By Alva Delbert-Evans and R. G. Redmond-Howard. Selwyn and Blount. 7s. 6d.

"Mystery, Melodrama and Macabre One-Act Plays." Pinker's Play Bureau. 3s. 6d.

"In the Mist." By Anthony Gittins. "The Doubtful Misfortune of Li Sing." By Neil Tuson. "Happy Landings." By Bernard Merivale. Deane & Sons. 1s. each.

"Shakespearean Costume." By F. M. Kelly. Adam and Charles Black. 8s. 6d.

"The Approach to Shakespeare." Edited by Richard Wilson. Nelson. 1s. 6d.

"Costuming the Biblical Play." By Lucy Barton. Adam and Charles Black. 5s.

"Clear Speech." By H. St. John Rumsey. Muller. 3s. 6d.

"A Poetry Speaking Anthology," Book III. Chosen and Edited by Hilda Adams and Anne Croasdel. Methuen. 1s. 6d.

THE five full-length plays are the most interesting feature of this month's list; none of them are negligible, and the first three, at least, show a thoroughly healthy desire for experiment. Mr. Stephen Spender has been at work for some time on his "tragic statement" in five acts, "Trial of a Judge," and the result is a striking and violently topical poetic drama of considerable significance. The Judge, surrounded by the malign forces of Facism, and, after a revocation of his first decision with regard to a political crime, sealing his fate by heroic honesty, is a noble, but scarcely human figure, and although the cast is large, the characterisation throughout is little more than a skilful exploitation of types to demonstrate the author's passionate political beliefs. The appalling situation, symbolically presented, and the gradual deepening of its horror, makes us feel afresh the terrible predicament of the modern world; but the habit of interspersing living verse with dull, matter of fact statements, and the love of ambiguity for its own sake (much the worst characteristic of modern poetic drama) detracts rather than adds to the compelling power of this starkly uncompromising play.

"Come of Age," by Miss Clemence Dane and Mr. Richard Addinsell is a genuinely unusual work. The fact that the authors remodelled it again and again for six years probably accounts for a subtlety which impedes and slightly confuses the action, but the attempt to give modern speech, with its slang and staccato emphasis, a verse formula is extremely interesting, even if the actual verse produced is not particularly arresting.

The theme is a bargain between the poet Chatterton and Death, who, coming for Chatterton after his suicide, in 18th century London, is persuaded to allow the poet to live again in order that he may experience the emotions he has missed. The "independent, brilliantly fatigued" woman who, in modern London and surrounded by some appalling people, supplies the requisite emotions to the strange "boy from upstairs," has some tiresome moments, but the scenes are alive, and the climax when Death returns for the poet has memorable qualities. Apart from the boy and the woman, there is a cast of nine men and eleven women, including four singers.

"The Masque of Kings" by the American dramatist, Mr. Maxwell Anderson, is a poetic drama dealing with the Crown Prince Rudolph of Hapsburg, who committed suicide at Mayerling in 1889. The storm-ridden Rudolph and the Emperor Franz Joseph are the principals, Elizabeth of Austria makes a downcast appearance, and, besides Rudolph's mistress, Mary Vetsera, there are a number of rather colourless minor characters. The heavy over-ornamented verse is at odds with the inevitable realism of incidents and people so near our own time, and, despite powerful scenes, the convention adopted makes the shadow of Ruritania persistently hover in the background.

"Blind Man's Buff" by Ernst Toller and Mr. Denis Johnston, is an adaptation of the latter dramatist's play "The Blind Goddess." The theme of that play—the blindness, cruelty and stupidity, often unintentional, shown on all hands during the developments of a sensational murder trial—certainly gains a more familiar interest when the action is transferred to Ireland, and the "big" scene takes place at the Central Criminal Court, Dublin. On the other hand, this play (for three women and twelve or more men) is not so moving or so pointed in its message despite better construction and a particularly skilful sense of climax, shown markedly at the close of most of the scenes. It is difficult not to wish that, while they were about it, these two distinguished dramatists had given us an entirely new play rather than a fresh version of one already fairly well known. The least exciting (but by far the most cheerful) play in this batch is "The Emperor of Make-Believe." Miss Madge Pemberton and Mr. Malcolm Morley, the authors, have chosen Hans Anderson as their hero, and this interesting choice and the well-suggested period atmosphere of the various scenes makes for a play of gentle humour and some pathos which should be very suitable for groups looking out for unsensational but quietly telling work. Possibly the object of Hans' hopeless devotion, Jenny Lind, the "Swedish Nightingale" is one of the least convincing of the fairly large number of characters—there are five women and nine men—but Hans himself is an excellent study, and, at the end, the exuberant Charles Dickens brings down the curtain in fine style.

"The Making of England," Mr. by Alva Delbert-Evans and Mr. R. G. Redmond-Howard, is in a class by itself. Described as "A Cavalcade of Empire," it is the dramatisation, on a vast scale, of most of the chief historical events from 1263 to 1284. The scenes are filled with

RECENT BOOKS

elaborate detail and pageantry of all kinds, and the cast is huge; the principal parts being Edward 1st and, in lesser degree, Henry III, Simon de Montfort and Eleanor of Castille. The intention of the authors is obviously sincere, and the play's message of hope and patriotism for a world filled with anarchy of all kinds could scarcely be unwelcome, yet the familiar airs of Wardour Street are by no means absent from either dialogue or general atmosphere, and although there are many surprising things about the play, perhaps the most surprising thing about it are the eulogies it has received from well known people, starting with Sir Cedric Hardwicke, whose enthusiastic preface would seem to herald a masterpiece.

Pinker's Play Bureau offer a new anthology, rather clumsily entitled "Mystery, Melodrama and Macabre One-Act Plays." It should be useful enough for those in search of thrillers, but is scarcely a book to read straight through as the reviewer is forced to do; the thrills are then apt to appear somewhat threadbare, and, in any case, there is one unwieldy and absurd Highland ghost play, "The Wraith of Wrath," which is unworthy of any collection. Much the best is Mr. Stuart Ready's well-known "Five at the 'George'," which is not only very exciting, but much better written than the rest. Miss Lal Norris' school drama, "Forty Years On," is one of the more normal; most of the others make a praiseworthy endeavour to be as eerie as possible—the most dangerous is Mr. Eric Logan's "Liquidation," because, unless very well done, it could easily be as funny as it is intended to be horrible. The three one-act plays from Messrs. Deane are varied fare. The first, "In The Mist," by Mr. Anthony Gittings, is the most satisfactory; for two men and two women, it is a rather grisly play of the Grand Guignol type with an effective curtain. Mr. Neil Tuson's title, "The Doubtful Misfortune of Li Sing," leaves one in no doubt as to the kind of play he has written; for one woman and seven men, it is amusing in a well-known manner; "Happy Landings," for six men, by Mr. Bernard Merivale, is one of the most embarrassingly feeble little plays we have read for some time.

Mr. F. M. Kelly, in "Shakespearean Costume for Stage and Screen," states that it is perfectly possible for every one of Shakespeare's plays to be costumed in absolute concordance with a given period of history, and in his scholarly book he gives detail after detail (obviously the result of much research) of the costumes of the Shakespearean world—mainly, of course, the world of the poet's own day. The volume includes a lengthy analysis of the years 1560 to 1620, a useful chapter on the "nice conduct" of period clothes, and suggestions for the costuming of each of the plays. The illustrations, also, have value, and throughout the book it is good to note the author's healthy scorn of all that "belongs to frippery." "The Approach to Shakespeare," having, we are told, already delighted some quarter million of children, is now offered to a wider public. Edited by Mr. Richard Wilson, with an introductory account of Shakespeare and Charles and Mary Lamb by Mrs. Andrew Lang, it consists of six of Lamb's "Tales from Shakespeare," two extracts from Holinshed and one each from Plutarch and Sir Walter Scott, interspersed with scenes from the comedies and tragedies described.

Miss Lucy Barton's "Costuming the Biblical Play" is considerably smaller than her recent volume on

historic costume, but, within its more limited scope, it shows the same grasp of detail, and can be recommended as a thoroughly useful book; everyone who contemplates the production of any form of biblical drama would do well to study it. Apart from the angelic or symbolical designs so often needed, Chaldean, Hebrew, Egyptian, Assyrian, Persian, Greek and Roman costumes are discussed and instructions given for making them and their ornaments. The many illustrations are no doubt serviceable, but are more pedestrian than the lively descriptions in which detailed information of all kinds is conveyed without the usual dullness.

Mr. H. St. John Rumsey's little book, "Clear Speech for Stage, Platform and Pulpit," contains much information and advice, and does not waste time with the customary none too lucid diagrams and strange drawings of the nose and throat. Not everyone will agree with some of the author's conclusions ("OO-N" as the correct pronunciation of "when" is a slight shock—if only at first), and the insistence on markedly slow speech and careful emphasis, although especially valuable for church work, may lead over-zealous students into heaviness of style. The third volume of "A Poetry Speaking Anthology," chosen and edited by Miss Hilda Adams and Miss Anne Crossdell, is for older children, and consists of poems, and some passages from the Bible, for refrain, dialogue, group, sequence, narrative and unison work, as well as ballads for acting and miming. Apart from its usefulness for schools, it forms, by itself, a delectable anthology for all poetry lovers.

SHAKESPEARE AT RICHMOND.

From June 22nd to 25th the Richmond Shakespeare Society presented "The Merchant of Venice" in the Terrace Gardens, Richmond. One might wonder how this play would appeal in the open air, but the gardens, even more beautiful than Regent's Park, provide a natural setting, with a beautiful vista of trees stretching away into the distance and glimpses of the river shimmering in the evening light provide a natural backcloth.

Mr. Robert J. Newton's delightfully ingenious production without being too clever satisfied any fears one might have had.

The standard of acting was so good that it would be unfair to select any individual performance.

The Richmond Corporation are to be congratulated on encouraging this Society in its work and I shall always remember the opening lines of Act V, Sc. 1, which, with the clever lighting and music, ended a memorable evening.

"The Moon shines bright! In such a night as this,
When the sweet wind did gently kiss the trees—"

W. A.

Fay Myddleton's play "The Perfume of Peace" was recently presented at the Rudolf Steiner Hall. The players were given a good reception, and the acting with one or two exceptions was good. Gerard Neville is to be congratulated not only on the production but on playing one of the chief parts with distinction.

A. M. RANKIN.

CLOTHES AND THE PLAYER

A COSTUME display in which one dress is paraded after another can be a very dull affair, and the rapid appearance of costume after costume often serves to bewilder the audience, so that it comes away with but a hazy and inaccurate impression. Miss Valerie Prentis and Miss Enid Barr in collaboration with Mr. Richard Southern have designed an original form of Lecture Demonstration which will obviate this. They have contrived that not only are the costumes shown, but, what is even more important, that the audience shall see the correct manner of wearing the clothes, and the customs and accessories of the period. How often one sees an excellent costume ruined by inattention to detail or deportment, and these demonstrations are planned to help the producer who wishes to obtain the best possible effect from his costumes.

The Lecture Demonstration takes the form of a series of little acted scenes dealing with various periods, in which information about costumes and customs is skilfully woven into the conversation. Each scene deals with a different aspect—one stresses the importance of texture, another deals with accessories, while a third shows the correct deportment of the age.

In introducing the demonstration to the delegates attending the recent "Drama in the Schools" Course at King's College, Miss Prentis said that it was a producer's duty to invest his characters with good costumes, since costume was a clue to psychology. Costume should be as accurate to period as is compatible with stage use. Pictorial effect should never be sacrificed for historical accuracy, but in order to be inaccurate with distinction one must first learn to be accurate.

Beginning with costume in the mid 15th century, the first scene showed a man of that period reading his wife a lecture from a book on the sin of vanity. First he attacked her horned head-dress, which he said was a device of the devil's. This gave the lady an excuse for showing the way the veil and barbe were worn. Next he found fault with the amount of material used in her gown, and here the lady was able to disclose the fact that eleven ells of material had been used. Eventually, growing tired of her husband's fault

finding, she turned the tables on him, and proved that in the meticulous care he took over the arrangement of the chaperon and liri-pipe the man of that period was just as vain as the woman.

The essence of the second scene was texture, and this was perhaps the most outstanding scene. It had all the beauty and warm colour of the 17th century Dutch paintings, and might indeed have been a Van Dyck picture come to life. There was the placid Dutchman leisurely filling his long pipe, and displaying his fine lawn shirt caught up with satin ribbons, his wide brimmed black hat with its knot of pale blue and scarlet ribbons, hanging from the back of his chair. On the opposite side of the table sat his lady in her gown of canary coloured and white satin, which matched the tulips she carried in her hand.

The third scene stressed the necessity for paying attention to accessories. We saw the sedate man of the world in his coat of cream brocade, then by the addition of a gold waistcoat, an exaggerated bow, re-arrangement of the wig, and a pallid face he became the fop. Again by the addition of a cane, patches, rouge, etc., and a stiffened gait he was transformed into the elderly dandy.

Deportment was the theme of the fourth scene, a study in gracefulness and gaucherie, showing how becoming a crinoline could be if worn correctly, but what an ugly contraption of steel wire it was if not managed properly. The fan, a delicate weapon in the helpless white hands of the coquette, would but reveal the clumsy movements of selfconscious hands.

The last scene introduced a touch of comedy; it showed the 19th century dandy in his bedroom, and what a solemn ritual the business of dressing was in those days; the cravat had to be tied with such great care, that after five unsuccessful attempts he was forced to call upon his wife for aid, who accomplished the difficult feat in less than a minute.

Further information about these Lecture-Demonstrations may be obtained from Miss Valerie Prentis, 10, Charlbert Street, St. John's Wood, N.W.8.

HEATHER CONWAY.

UNAUTHORISED VERSIONS

By C. B. Pulman

THE author of a play, in setting his scene, describes in more or less concise terms what he wishes that scene to be, allowing much or little latitude in its actual arrangement and design in production. It is, or so it seems to me, in those matters of conception and arrangement for production that the little theatre movement could, but rarely does, take imaginative and experimental liberties, even in forms of the drama which are not themselves truly experimental.

The fault and the folly of the neglect of the scene itself as an important part of the play is the responsibility of both the professional theatre and of the author. The author is perhaps the less blameworthy, yet one is frequently forced to regret how seldom the writer's imaginative concepts are carried forward into his scene.

It is the scene which is an important mood-creator and which, swiftly and surely, can bridge the momentary gulf which lies between the audience and the play. Not only does a more thoughtful design and arrangement of the scene demand and maintain a greater degree of interest in the audience, it aids the audience's reception and understanding of those other and designedly more imaginative parts of the drama, the dialogue and the action.

There would appear to be no adequate reason for the gross neglect by producers and even by designers themselves of the possibilities of the scene in almost everything save purely period and experimental drama.

It would be presumptuous to suggest that there are not better ways, even in the following particularised cases, of improving on the author's conceptions of his scene, yet they do serve as illustrations of the manner in which new versions of conventional plans as suggested by the author can be presented.

Both are treatments of mine used in productions of mine for the Bradford Civic Playhouse, one of the foremost and certainly the most modern of little theatres in the kingdom.

In James Bridie's "The Black Eye," I deliberately employed distortion and exaggeration, aiming to ally the visual content with the dialogue and action moods of this extraordinary comedy. This was *not* done only in the more matter-of-fact living room of the

Windlestraw home. The office walls were made to bear a welter of bills, posters and calendars at odd angles, covering all available space, and obviously accentuating the ideas of the author as to temporal conditions and as to locale.

This, though unquestionably effective, was a comparatively easy and simple thing to do. The problem in another production of mine was neither of these, nor, I think, was its solution. The play was Eugene O'Neill's "Days without End," in which the two entities of a man, who appear on the stage simultaneously in the shape of two players, conflict for possession of the man.

The actual plot does not affect the problem except in one particular of scene mechanics, for, up to the final short scene, it is important and advisable to employ a realistic background to the play's combined abstraction and mysticism, for these latter are conveyed throughout in practical and realistic terms and movements.

The final scene, following immediately on an intricate and somewhat difficult double-set of bedroom and study seen together, is in a nearby church which, the action demands no less than the mood, shall be reached with the minimum loss of time.

In the first place, instead of having the bedroom and study side-by-side, as directed by the author, I took the liberty of staging the bedroom at the rear half of the stage, this being seen through an archway forming an inner proscenium before which the study actions could go on. There was thus an immediate gain over the author's method, for now there was a simultaneous and direct view of the whole scene and action, as could only have been achieved otherwise in film.

Furthermore the few furnishings could be rapidly dispersed behind the false proscenium at the end of the scene. The following and final scene of the church is planned for in some detail by O'Neill and planned, moreover, as a piece of realism. Now, it seemed to me that this was at most a mistake and at least unsatisfactory.

The whole mood of that final scene is more than realistic. With that conviction and the knowledge of the necessity for a swift change of scene—for the final phase of the play oc-



PAINTED AND APPLIQUÉ CURTAIN DESIGNED
BY SYLVIA ROWLEY FOR THE REVUE
"VITAMIN Z" PRODUCED BY THE UN-
NAMED SOCIETY, MANCHESTER, MAY, 1938.



SCENE FROM "THE PIE AND THE TART"
AS PRODUCED BY ROBERT NEWTON AT
KING STANDING, BURTON-ON-TRENT,
DESIGNED BY W. H. DURST.
See page 164.

UNAUTHORISED VERSIONS

cupies only three or four minutes itself—the problem was to devise and design an unauthorised version, let us say, of that church.

The eventual solution came by removing the head-piece of the inner proscenium, leaving two high, plain vertical walls in place of a rectangular arch. The furnishings of the outer and inner rooms having been removed, unobstructed view was permitted through to the rear wall. (In this case the rear wall was a cyclorama, though a plain backcloth would have fulfilled a similar purpose).

A rostrum of steps crossing the whole open space between the walls was inserted. The "good" entity gradually ascended these as the climax of "salvation" was reached, the "evil" entity descending in unison. Physical movement was thus allied to the idea behind the dialogue.

On to the rear wall there was projected the black shadow of an enormous crucifix, the projector being so arranged as to distort the shape and give the cross the appearance of looming outwards towards the audience. The wall itself was lighted at the opening in dim, deep blue. As the scene progressed the lighting changed through purple and reds to rich amber, the shadow of the crucifix being simultaneously dimmed out, until its disappearance was compensated for by the "good" entity assuming a cruciform pose on the highest step of the rostrum.

Incidentally, the whole scene was accompanied by an amplified recording of Sibelius' "Finlandia," 2nd movement, which amplifies perfectly with the length, tempo and mood of the scene. Thus, actor, colour, volume of light, physical movement, dialogue and music were equally blended and a result achieved which could never have been afforded had the directions of the author himself been observed.

While I should be the last person to propose interfering in any way with the script of plays themselves, because I consider the author to know more about that side of the drama than I do, I do recommend designing and arranging the scene with an imagination too rarely bestowed upon it by the author. That is, at any rate, until such time as the authors themselves devise something a little better than: "Scene—A Room," which is about all their present directions reduce to.

SUMMER EVENTS IN FRANCE AND BELGIUM.

At Nancy, July 14th and September 4th, 11th and 18th, Theatre de la Passion: "Jeanned'Arc," an historical drama in six acts.

At Orange, June 26th, Roman Theatre: Grand Gala of the Press Association—"Carmen," with Micheletti, Mme. Marguerite Joye of the Opera Comique, and the Symphony Orchestra. July 23rd and 24th, performance of two tragedies. July 30th and 31st, and August 1st, Grand Art Cycle, three operatic presentations.

At Saint Malo, August 9th and 10th, "Bretagne et Duchesse," a lyric poem with the "Concerts Lamoureux" and artists from the Opera and Opera-Comique.

At Vichy, June 15th. Opening of the Musical Season. 1st July to 15th September, Grand Concert every Monday. End of July, opening of the International Season, the programme of which includes a series of Italian operas with famous stars, including Lauri Volpi.

Bruges. "The Play of the Holy Blood." Open-Air Mass-Play. This grandly conceived Play has been written for, and the music adapted for presentation in the mediaeval town of Bruges, where several drops of the Precious Blood of Our Lord have been preserved since 1150. Text and General Direction: Jozef Boon, C.S.S.R. Dates of performance: Saturday, August 20th at 9 p.m., Sunday August 21st at 6 p.m., Thursday August 25th at 9 p.m., Saturday August 27th at 9 p.m., and Sunday August 28th at 9 p.m.

THE IRISH NATIONAL THEATRE.

In the programme for the coming Festival Performances, Mr. Lennox Robinson writes:—

"We can never, situated as we are, become a wealthy theatre. Our seating capacity is too small. We play for forty-six weeks of the year, changing our programme each week. This does not mean that each week we produce a new play; we frequently revive old ones, but it means constant, untiring rehearsal. Not all our players are whole-timers, some of them have other professions and come to us for part of their precious lunch-hour, come to us again when their day's work is over. Anyone who has worked in the ordinary commercial theatre will think this method of production impossible; we have proved it possible. Perhaps it would not be possible if our theatre were an ordinary theatre, but we are something more. We have behind us a tradition of years of willing, unpaid service on the part of the directors and players and playwrights, a memory of lean years of war when players' salaries hardly kept them in boots, a knowledge that the work of our theatre has played no small part in the creation of our State. We are, in fact, small as we are, in every sense of the word an Irish National Theatre, something which can be seen in Dublin and nowhere else in the world. Our short history can teach nothing to any country, our recipe could only have been cooked over an Irish fire. There has been behind it the determination of a few people, that determination which was expressed thirty years ago in the statement signed by Lady Gregory and Edward Martyn and Mr. Yeats, but the Theatre has been shaped by the genius of its playwrights and its players. Its future is unknown: it is hidden in the brains of the dramatists yet to come."

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

OUR FESTIVAL REPORT.

DEAR SIR,

In your brief report of the National Final at Glasgow you quote from the "Glasgow Herald." I think it hardly wise to have done this, as that paper was so obviously partisan and did not give a fair view of the teams as a whole. No team could have reached the Final without having great merit.

I am not concerned with the placing of the teams, but, I do regret the lack of appreciation of some of the teams by the adjudicators, by the audience and by the newspaper representatives (I cannot call them critics.)

My own team the Hulme Valley Comedy Players, had the unenviable task of performing my Yorkshire dialect play, "T'Second Time of Asking," to an audience which were evidently puzzled by the idiom, and moreover they were compelled to play first after having been allocated fourth position.

Until their performance of the play at Glasgow I had never fully realised how much an audience can contribute to a play. With this essential contribution from the audience, my players in my play have received the highest praise from adjudicators at five dramatic festivals this year and have been placed first on each occasion. The tribute we perhaps treasure most is that of Mr. Lewis Casson's who compared some of our playing to that of the Abbey Theatre Players.

Without this contribution from the audience at Glasgow, what, to former adjudicators, had been full of variety of pace and tone, appeared to lack variety and attack, and what, in the first round, was "a very interesting and living production played with great spontaneity and polished technique" was full of "elementary weaknesses in acting and production."

Our final report provides very amusing reading when compared with our three earlier reports, and it leads me to wonder why, when the B.D.L. provide a series of dialect records and when the majority of teams entering the Festival are from villages and small towns, they do not take more care to provide final adjudicators who are in sympathy with village problems and who have experience of village players. In regard to our performance the adjudicators missed altogether the fact that my players had created this play.

One outstanding feature of this year's Festival, however, has been the true sporting spirit of all the teams we have met. I don't know which was the greater pleasure, to win or lose against them.

Yours etc.,

GEO. TAYLOR.

Holmfirth, Yorks.

We are glad to print Mr. Taylor's letter since it states a common difficulty when winning players in earlier rounds of the Festival find themselves lower down in the Final. The Companies who succeed in a Festival Final are those who are able to overcome the inevitable resistance of a strange audience. The conditions here approximate to those of the professional theatre, and it is only the more experienced teams who pass the ordeal. We do not believe that the "Glasgow Herald" was prejudiced in its report, which we quoted as giving an objective account of the reactions of the audience to the programme. —Editor, "Drama."

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"CANNED" THEATRE MUSIC

DEAR SIR,

I have recently much enjoyed the performance of "The Zeal of Thy House" at the Garrick Theatre. I consider it a fine play, splendidly acted and magnificently staged. But there is one jarring note: the "canned" music produced by a rather tired gramophone "off" is utterly unworthy of the play and the rest of the production.

It is one of the misfortunes of small amateur producers that they are frequently compelled to stoop to this device, but cannot our leading West End managers afford to provide us with real singers to give an adequate rendering of those magnificent plain-song chants of which the audience at the Garrick was faintly reminded?

Unfortunately this is no isolated instance. The tendency appears to be increasing.

Yours faithfully,

J. P. WALKER.

Wilson House,
Epsom College, Surrey.

SIXTEENTH ANNUAL DRAMA COMPETITION OF THE LONDON FEDERATION OF BOYS' CLUBS.

All the finalists in the Boys' Clubs' Shakespeare Festival reached a very high standard. Speed and production were above the usual amateur level. Teamwork, on the other hand, was disappointing.

West Central won the cup with an excerpt from "King Henry V." The large cast all did well, the king's part being especially well played and the comedy scenes acted with great spirit. Moreover, the planning of the production showed originality and good effects were obtained by means of grouping, lighting, and off-stage chanting, trumpet alarms, etc.

Stamford Hill came second with scenes from "The Merchant of Venice." Shylock gave the finest individual performance of the evening, a performance which unquestionably reached professional standards. Mention must also be made of Portia's sincerity and unforced dignity.

Scenes from "Richard II" acted by Eton Manor, took the third place. Better balance would have been achieved in this production if Bolinbroke and Richard could have exchanged parts. Of the two, the actor playing Bolinbroke had the greater subtlety. Despite this mistake in the casting, they both did well, Bolinbroke especially playing with dignity and an excellent sense of attack. Speech generally was a little inclined to be monotonous but in movement the entire cast outstripped the rest of the competitors. Costumes were worn with absolute ease and naturalness, and gesture was both expressive and well-sustained.

Attention must also be drawn to the speaking of the Chorus in the North West Jewish production of "King Henry V," also to the King's good performance. Lastly, in the Stepney Jewish "Richard II," Gaunt had great freshness and sincerity. Excellence of tempo characterised the production and the announcement of Gaunt's death was one of the most impressive moments in the whole evening.

ALISON GRAHAM-CAMPBELL.

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

BRYANSTON SCHOOL, DORSET.

Ibsen's "Pillars of Society" was performed at Bryanston School recently. The choice of this play is not altogether surprising in a public school which has in the past given us "Caesar and Cleopatra," "Murder in the Cathedral" and "The Cherry Orchard." Why not Ibsen too?

"Pillars of Society" depicts the smugness of a nineteenth century family, the head of which is Karsten Bernick, a wealthy and esteemed shipbuilder. He has risen to power and prosperity on the foundations of a lie and a scandal which 15 years ago had branded Johan, his brother-in-law, as a criminal. When Johan and Lona, Bernick's sister-in-law, return from their exile in America he has to face their taunts and condemnations. Should a pillar of society confess—and bring disgrace and ruin to himself and to his revered family?

Perhaps a play on this theme is beyond the acting powers of any schoolboy, and inevitably there were signs of this in the Bryanston production. It was a pity that the dialogue between Bernick and this little son Olaf was not made more convincing. Olaf has promised his father that he will never run away again. Bernick replies that the boy will never have reason to, adding: "For the future you shall be allowed to grow up, not as the heir to my life's work, but as one who has his own life's work before him . . . You shall be yourself, Olaf, the rest may take care of itself."

This was a brave thing for a dramatist to say in 1870. To-day, though it requires less courage to repeat those words, how frequently they are forgotten or ignored. The players might have made this incident lively, but it slipped by almost unnoticed. The boys, however, did their best, and in some parts, especially Martha and Mrs. Bernick, the characters came to life with the gentle pathos and simplicity which a talented actress would find it hard to emulate. These two performances made a deep impression. The production was most interesting and enjoyable. Mr. W. S. H. Cowley must be the envy of many public school masters for being allowed so much scope.

DICKIN MOORE.

Bryanston School,
Blandford, Dorset.

THE THEATRE OF YOUTH

On Saturday, May 21st, The Theatre of Youth presented an interesting programme at the Rudolf Steiner Hall arranged by the energetic and enthusiastic Hon. Secretary, Miss Rance Corlett.

Many children were thrilled to see Miss Rose Fyfe and to hear her speak on poetry and plays. She watched with delight little children from St. Christopher's, Beckenham, act her play "Naughts and Crosses." Other items followed in quick succession—"Siciliana" created by Lilian Oakeshott, of the Guildhall School of Music; Hugh Stewart's "A Room in the Tower" performed by the Convent School, Matlock. A warm welcome was given to these young actors from afar. One object the Theatre of Youth has in view is that plays written within the capacity of the child actor should be played and seen by children.

Did the choice of this dramatic scene suggest a dearth of suitable plays for the child actors? Part 1 concluded with a charming Ballet "All in a Garden Fair," created by Cleaver Lee.

Part 2 opened with a most finished performance of "Pavane pour une Infante defunte." A complete change followed—Westville Road S.G. School Verse Speaking Choir. Two items by the Roemar School of Dancing, "Snow Revels" and "In the Days of John Leech." A play based on an Indian legend, "Savitri—Satyavan" by Jay Vernon, finished an attractive programme.

E. E. C.

COVENTRY.

Readers may be interested to know that the Cathedral Mummers (Coventry) have this season produced the play "A Hundred Years Old" for two nights, a substantial profit being made which has been given to a charitable object. A further one-act play was given on two occasions at other Cathedral functions.

This society has recently been reconstituted and has as its aim the presentation of plays which show the particular relationship between religion and Drama. Only the best of these plays are considered as it is recognised that many of these plays would not hold the interest of an average audience. It will be seen therefore that we have set ourselves a task which is not an easy one. The results of our first efforts are however very encouraging and to emphasise the corporate nature of the work which must of necessity be as a team than individual, the members, including producer, etc., carry out the work anonymously, the only names appearing on programmes, etc., being the characters in the play.

We think this may be a somewhat unique arrangement and may interest other societies if you care to publish this report.

A party of twelve attended the Drama League Festival here and enjoyed the plays presented. While all of us agreed with the Adjudicator's decision, we could have wished for more criticism of the various characters and make-up, etc., to enable us to correct our own faults. We hope to compete in the Festival next year mainly in order to learn how to correct our mistakes.

WATFORD REPERTORY COMPANY.

The Granville-Barker translation of Sierra's play "The Kingdom of God" is a difficult play for amateurs and the Watford Repertory Company is to be congratulated on undertaking such a task. The performance (at St. John's Hall, Watford, on Saturday, 30th April), while not reaching the heights of some of the Company's previous productions was chiefly noteworthy for the team work of the whole of the large cast. Barbara Greenwood gave a beautiful study of the part of Sister Garcia. Miss Rose Lloyd-King, the producer, must have had many anxious moments at rehearsals, but no doubt she will feel that the play was well worth while.

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

"IN THE NEWS"

By A. J. BROWN.

Considerable interest was aroused in Oldham by the presentation of a new play at the Oldham Repertory Theatre during the week commencing 23rd May, 1938.

"In the News" deals with events in the history of a provincial newspaper of the more solid type and the lives of its staff. It is interesting, the dialogue is good, and with a little trimming and polishing should merit a successful career.

Mr. Williams and his colleagues gave a very creditable presentation of a play which possesses considerable merits. It should appear shorn of a couple of characters with the sentimentality of the Editor toned down and, I suggest, a certain toning down of a few lines. The introduction of a pyjama scene in the Second Act appears irrelevant, though the Secretary carefully explains that when she was urgently summoned by the Editor, she was just getting out of her bath, and her dressing gown fell in. The author is evidently convinced of the harshness of the laws of Libel and a believer in the role of the Press as an agent for Peace. "In the News" is worthy of attention and, though one may disagree with much and reflect on some very curious office routine, it is neither to be condemned or damned with faint praise.

F. L. P.

KING'S STANDING.

The performance of "The Pie and the Tart," a photograph of which occurs in the current issue of "Drama," was part of a school for members of unemployed clubs. This school was organised by the National Council of Social Service and took place at King's Standing, Burton-on-Trent, a residential centre where courses on many different subjects are held. Those students who had not parts in "The Pie and the Tart" (the cast of which is a small one) rehearsed a dramatic episode dealing with the Carlist rising in Spain. About 30 students had speaking parts in this, and the item was produced by Lionel Millard who directed the school.

Drama Groups attached to such clubs are springing up throughout the country, and in many cases the members are acquiring a genuine interest in the subject and are only too anxious to learn about production, make-up, scenery and so forth. The development of the work has, however, been held up in many cases for want of suitable voluntary leaders, but in some districts the members are tackling the question of production themselves and special schools are being organised for this purpose.

LIVERPOOL COLLEGE FOR GIRLS.

On Friday, Saturday and Monday, July 15th, 16th and 18th, at the Liverpool College for Girls, Huyton, the College will present a play "Fairy Gold" by Mr. Alvin Langdon Coburn with music by Mr. Granville Bantock. This play has been specially written for the School, and the music also has been specially composed. Tickets from 5s. to 1s. 3d. (children half price) and full particulars can be obtained from Miss Jefferson, Liverpool College, Huyton, and Messrs. Rushworth and Draper, Islington, Liverpool.

HOLME VALLEY PLAYERS.

The Holme Valley Comedy Players, Holmfirth, were formed by George Taylor in 1934 for the purpose of keeping the Yorkshire dialect alive and to build up a native drama. They have specialised in productions of one-act plays by George Taylor and this year have had a remarkable record in Festival work. At Scarborough and Doncaster they were the highest marked team in each festival with "T" Second Time of Asking" by George Taylor.

This year they have joined the British Drama League for the first time and they entered the National Festival with the same play. They were successful in reaching the National Final at Glasgow and were placed fourth out of five teams.

They are to continue their good work and hope to produce a full length play next season.

THE BABER REPERTORY COMPANY.

On May 10th, this Company produced Oscar Wilde's "Lady Windermere's Fan" at the Fortune Theatre on behalf of the Black Lake Convalescent House at Farnham. This is a play which is interesting as a period piece. Its remoteness from the present day makes it difficult to realise that it was written only 47 years ago. In this particular performance the acting on the whole was good, though the women's parts were better played than the men's, the costumes were well chosen, and the production in the hands of Mr. Tom Harrison was spirited and unobtrusive. The Baber Repertory Company is to be congratulated on having given the large audience present such a good evening's entertainment. Miss Ellaline Terriss, speaking on behalf of her husband, Sir Seymour Hicks, made an appeal on behalf of the charity in aid of which the performance was given.

THE OTHERWISE CLUB.

This Club is presenting its seventh summer season of plays in the Barn Theatre, Shere, Surrey. Entrance is by membership ticket only, which can be obtained free of charge on application to the Manager. Shere can be easily reached by bus from Guildford and Dorking. The programme includes "The Wood Demon" by Chekhov for one week beginning July 18th, "Mariana" a Spanish legend by Lorca, produced by John Burrell (August 1st); "They Fly by Twilight" a drama of Cockney Life, by Paul Dornhurst (August 15th), and "The Road to Ruin" by Thomas Holcroft, first produced in 1792 (August 29th). This is a most interesting venture and should be well supported.

GRACE DARLING CENTENARY.

To celebrate the Centenary, the Constance Smedley Play Centre, 2, Garden Court, 66, Clarendon Road, London, W.1, announces a Competition Festival for Play-readings of Miss Smedley's play on Grace Darling entitled "Eight Heroes and a Heroine." Points for marking will include Characterisation, Diction, Tonal Values of Sound Effects and Music, which, after the manner of a broadcast play, will be introduced as a background to the reading. Full particulars may be obtained from the address given above.

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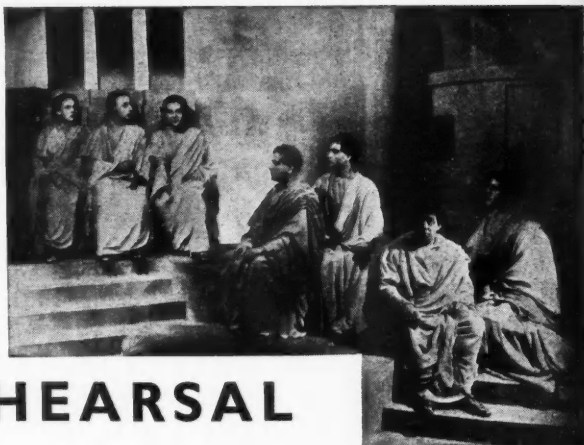
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